7: Gulick E-5 (1952) 1955 ME1 Lebanon ME1

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR

RITES OF PASSAGE

BIRTHDAYS AND BAPTISM

IN the traditional culture of the Middle East (urban, village, or nomad), the status of midwife is a very important one. Midwives are invariably local women past menopause, and men are rigidly excluded from the house while the birth is taking place (cf. Granqvist, 1947, pp. 56-60).

Only one villager was born during the period of study, and the event took place in Beirut (the family is in the Summer Resident category) some time before the writer learned of it. The majority of Mtoqil's housewives of childbearing age live in the city most of the year, and for the most part they closely prefer the services of physicians and hospitals in important medical matters.

Once born, the modern village infant, judging from the very few cases observed, spends his time in a crib and is not swaddled restrictively. After the first few weeks, he may be fed from a modern nursing bottle. Factory-made toys are not very common in Lebanon, but small cars and trucks and at least one tricycle were observed in the village.

Birthday anniversaries are celebrated in a few families. There is a cake with candles, and the whole affair is new, probably inspired by experiences in American boarding schools.

Baptism is performed anywhere from forty days to about two years after the birth of the child. It appeared that the mode tended toward the latter age. The ritual is accompanied by at least a family party, but in some cases, according to one informant, the baptismal party may approach a wedding party in size.

ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE

Engagement. Engagement (*khuṭbi*) is a more or less formal status. Quite often the couple simply declare themselves engaged, with the tacit approval of the priest. If both parties are members of the village, the priest's only official concern is that they are more distantly related than first cousin. If they are first cousins, it is his duty to inform them that he will be unable to marry them. In any case, the couple may or may not come to the priest for his blessing. Wedding rings (plain gold bands) are worn by both parties on the right hand to signify engagement. At the marriage ceremony, they are transferred to the left. Engaged couples may see each other alone at any time, and no questions are asked. Young

17: Tannous 5, G-5 (ca. 1947-48)1949 MEI Lebanon MEI

Parents, after the birth of their first son, cease to be addressed by their given names. They are now addressed by the nam of their son, as the father or the mother of so-and-so. On the other hand, the members of the younger generation, until theyare married, are referred to and introduced as the children of so-and-so, of such-and-such a family.

An outstanding characteristic of this rural family organization is that, with minor exceptions in certain parts of Lebanon,the woman occupies a relatively high status. Moslem or Christian, she does not submit to the veil, nor does she suffer from udue segregation. In the majority of cases, boys and girls attendthe same village school. Whenever both men and women do farm work, we find, as a general rule, that division of labor prevails, with the lighter tasks assigned to women. In many villages ofthe mountain region, an increasing proportion of women do not do any farm work at all, applying themselves completely to homemaking. Some fifty years ago the doors of higher education were opened to the village women of Lebanon. Since then they have played an increasingly important role in national leadershipand development as teachers, writers, doctors, lawyers, and enlightened homemakers.

Recreational activity, to one degree or another, is characteristic of many rural societies. This seems to be an essential need, biologically and socially, of human group life. By this means the group gives spontaneous expression, in symbolic form, to the fundamental values of its life and to its aspirations. The rural society of Lebanon is outstanding in this respect, having developed a rich recreational heritage that is well known in the Arabic-speaking world. Some aspects of this heritage have been carried to, and kept alive in, foreign countries by Lebanese emigrants. The Lebanese farmer is characterized by a well-developed sense of humor and a lively tendency to indulge in pranks. He loves to compose folk poetry and sing folk songs, when alone working in his fields or when in the company of friends. From his early childhood he learns to be a good folk dancer. At the sametime his community life is characterized by an abundance of recreational expression.

Occasions for community festivities and group-play activity

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are numerous and varied. A large number of these are related to the religious life of the community. In addition to the regular weekly holiday and other general holidays of the Christians or Moslems, there are several community festivals held in honor of particular patron saints. Each of these festivals is an occasion for people of several villages to get together and celebrate, sometimes for two or three days at a time. They visit, trade, compete in games, compose folk poetry, participate in religious chanting or group singing, and dance the well-known folk dance, the *dabki*.

In a similar manner the people celebrate the harvesting of some of their crops. Also in the *sukva* they have a well-developed recreational institution: an evening get-together at one of the homes to visit, play games, or listen to a story being read or told. At the time of a wedding or a funeral, practically the whole community, old and young, halts its routine activities and participates in the affair. Here again the group manifests its solidarity and takes a new hold on life by expanding its happiness in the first case, and by lightening the burden of its sorrows in the second.

The village community of Lebanon is thus essentially a co-operative unit: in its family organization, in its traditions of neighborliness, in its religious institutions and social life, in its educational efforts. Co-operation, in one degree or another, is also involved in many agricultural activities such as the threshing of grain, the sharing of draft animals, and the assigning of water rights.

One can readily see in this a promising and secure foundation on which to establish a successful organization of agricultural co-operatives according to modern principles and techniques. In fact, a beginning has already been made along this line. In 1944 the Lebanese Government passed a decree providing for the establishment of a co-operative council, whose function is to guide and supervise the projected movement. The decree also covers various essential details of organization, obligations and rights of members, audit and inspection, and voting procedure.

The successful co-operative experiment of Abadiyeh village, in the mountains above Beirut, provides a striking demonstration of the manner in which such a developmental scheme can